

NARRATOR: Larkin, Jim

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: April 19, 2000

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumpers/Forest Fire Fighters

Tape

Counter	Summary
000	Introduction.
010	Larkin became interested in flying in 1928 after his mother bought he and his brother a ride in an airplane. Later, he flew in Donnelly, Idaho, in a Curtis Junior Airplane. He told about flying in and around the McCall/Donnelly area in central Idaho.
040	During World War II, he learned how to fly through the Civilian Pilot Training program. Larkin earned a scholarship with the highest grade in the training school. Larkin worked as flight instructor in California and in air transport during the war. He flew throughout the world during the war, including the Panama Canal Zone, the east coast of the United States, Australia, and "Over the Hump," which was flying over the Himalayas.
095	After the war Larkin and his brother, Jack, flew out of the Donnelly airport in various jobs, including crop dusting. In 1949 Larkin began work for the Johnson Flying Service. This flying service worked for the Forest Service throughout the year. Larkin flew with them until 1957 when he went into business for himself. Larkin told a story about how he got the finances to buy a plane for his own business.
140	Larkin contracted with the Forest Service to fly smokejumpers out of the Idaho City camp. The Forest Service bought a Beech Travelair; Larkin flew that plane along with others from 1958-1978, when he worked for the U.S. Forest Service.
170	Flying the Forest Service was a year-round operation. Larkin talked about what jobs he flew during all the seasons, including flying with skis as landing gear during the winter. Larkin noted that they were always busy, particularly in the summer.
220	Larkin described the difference between landing on skis (or floats) as opposed to landing with wheel-based landing gear. Larkin told a story about landing with skis near Chamberlain Basin; he almost wrecked the Beech Travelair.
290	During the summer Larkin worked with the smokejumpers, including helping the rookies (Neds) practice their jumps. Larkin also detailed what

he did as a pilot during a fire. He also talked about how pilots helped with fire control, trying to keeping small fires from becoming big fires. Larkin also furnished his opinions on how practice or how fighting small fires help to keep all aspects of the fire crew's skills sharp.

430 When the airplane's crew found the fire, there were many procedures to follow before smokejumpers jumped. Larkin discussed the various procedures he followed before the jumpers left the plane. He told a story about his brother, Rusty, who was a smokejumper in the early 1950s.

485 **END OF SIDE ONE**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Assam, India (now Bangladesh)
Calcutta, India
Chamberlain Basin
Chennault, Claire (organized “Flying Tigers” in China before and during World War II)
Chiang Kai-shek, China
Davis, Oscar
Donnelly, Idaho
Dorris, Mike
Ford Tri-Motor
Johnson Flying Service
Klinkhammer, Peter
Larkin, Jack
Larkin, Rusty
Long Beach, California
Mackay Bar
McCall, Idaho
Meachem, Oregon (town between La Grande and Pendleton)
Moulton, Chet
Newark, New Jersey
Ontario, Oregon
Rankin Academy (Tulare, California)
Shepp Ranch
Stonebreaker Ranch
Tulare, California
United State Forest Service
Watson Lake
Webb, Wayne

NARRATOR: Larkin, Jim

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: April 26, 2000

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumpers/Forest Fire Fighters (Pilot)

Tape

Counter Summary

000	Introduction.
005	Larkin talked about his brother, Rusty, who was a smokejumper, and told a story about how Rusty and Wayne Webb—a fellow smokejumper—fought a fire after they both injured themselves landing.
025	Larkin detailed how the jumpers “told” the pilot and spotter the status of the jumpers after they landed. He also detailed how the pilot and spotter dropped the jumpers’ cargo onto the jump site. Larkin tried not to hang up the cargo chutes in trees, because the jumpers would have to climb up the tree to get the equipment and the parachute.
070	After dropping the jumpers and cargo, Larkin returned to the airport in McCall. During some seasons Larkin would then immediately get more jumpers and fly off to another fire. Larkin also talked about the other summer flying jobs he did for Johnson Flying Service.
100	McCall was much different, according to Larkin, in the 1940s and 1950s. Things changed in McCall when new owners bought the Shore Lodge. These new owners helped to change the dynamic of the town.
125	Larkin bought a Cunningham Hall airplane in 1956 and went into business on his own. He talked about why he left the Johnson Flying Service and what eventually happened to Johnson Flying Service. During his time flying for Johnson, Larkin also dropped cargo and food to the fire camps in the various national forests in central Idaho.
190	Larkin briefly mentioned where he flew in Idaho during his time with Johnson Flying Service.
205	After Larkin brought his Cunningham Hall to McCall, he worked for the Forest Service flying jumpers at a camp at Idaho City, Idaho. His work at Idaho City led to a full-time position with the Forest Service. He described a Twin Beech airplane that he flew for the Forest Service that was designed for the Service, including a “jato” system, which was a rocket system that would help the plane if the engines failed.

- 280 Larkin knew a lot of people in the Forest Service, and that led to his full-time employment with the Service. In the beginning the Forest Service found work to keep Larkin busy in the non-fire season. He worked repairing chainsaws at first, but eventually the paperwork and training kept him busy throughout the year.
- 335 The fire season began and continued at different times in different parts of the United States throughout the year. Larkin detailed the places in the states and Mexico that he flew to fight fire from early spring through late fall. Regardless of what region Larkin was in, his job as a pilot rarely changed. Smokejumpers could have problems in certain regions of the country, because the trees were much taller than their let-down rope. Larkin told a story about a “biscuit gun” at the jumper base in Winthrop, Washington.
- 405 Larkin flew air tankers, beginning in the 1960s. Larkin talked about flying air tankers to fight fire and also to spray timber to kill insects.
- 450 Larkin told Reeves what the acronym, GTBM, (Grumman Torpedo Bombers) stands for. These planes were used for fire retardant spraying and timber spraying.
- 465 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
- 015 Larkin continued to talk about the differences or similarities between timber spraying and fire-retardant drops. Larkin first dropped Sodium Calcium Borate on fires; it worked quite well, but it also sterilized the soil. They then began to use Bentnight (?) Clay on fires. Larkin also discussed flying planes that dropped water on planes. The planes that could drop water were either the PBY’s (Patrol Bombers) or the Canadair CL-215. The CL-215 was used in California and in France; it was rarely, if ever, used in Idaho.
- 075 During the 1960s Larkin dropped fire retardant and smokejumpers. He also flew DC-3’s to pick up Native Americans in New Mexico and Arizona to bring them to fires in Idaho.
- 090 Larkin worked long days in the summer. He spent many hours each day flying. He talked about fatigue; he did little things with the plane to help him fight fatigue. He mentioned the night flying he did during his time with the Forest Service.
- 150 Larkin discussed the beginning of the Boise Interagency Fire Center, which is now the National Interagency Fire Center. He led the Western Zone Air Unit, which was housed near the air terminal in Boise in the

early 1960s. This job included flying planes that scanned for fires using infrared technology. His Western Zone Air Unit joined with the Bureau of Land Management, the National Weather Service, and other group of the Forest Service to create the Boise Interagency Fire Center.

- 195 Larkin discussed, in detail, the science behind scanning for fires at night using infrared technology. The information gathered from the infrared scanner could be photographed and dropped to the fire boss almost immediately.
- 290 Larkin talked about Forest Service policies, including the 10 a.m. policy. Any change in policy did not change Larkin's job as a pilot. Pilots always were part of the initial attack on a fire.
- 325 During his time in the forest service, Larkin flew many different planes on many different jobs. He even flew in India to train their country's pilots about timber spraying. Among all of his jobs, Larkin tested the pilots in the Forest Service to decide what planes and missions each could fly. By the time he retired, Larkin did not need to fix chainsaws in the winter to keep busy; the Forest service kept him quite busy throughout the year.
- 380 Larkin described how he learned to fly helicopters and what helicopter pilots do to help fight forest fires. The main job of the helicopter pilot was to fly in "ground pounders" or hot-shot crews to the fire. Helicopters are a main tool in fighting fires, only their expense keeps them from being used even more during fire season.
- 480 Larkin retired from the Forest Service in 1978. He began to explain why he retired when the tape ended.
- 495 **END OF SIDE TWO**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Arnold Aviation (flying company in Cascade and McCall, Idaho)
Boise National Forest
Boise, Idaho
Bryning, Karl
Bureau of Land Management
Down, Elden
Evergreen Aviation (flying company in McCall, Idaho)
Garden Valley, Idaho
Grangeville, Idaho
Hartnett, Clare
Hettinger Ranch (?)
Idaho City, Idaho
Johnson Flying Service
Larkin, Rusty
McCall, Idaho
Missoula, Montana
National Interagency Fire Center (Boise, Idaho)
Riggins, Idaho
Salmon River
Sevaria (?), Robert
Shore Lodge (McCall, Idaho)
Stover, Smoky
United States Forest Service
Webb, Wayne
Western Zone Air Unit (Boise, Idaho)
Winthrop, Washington

NARRATOR: Larkin, Jim

INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves

DATE: August 24, 2000

LOCATION: Boise, Idaho

PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting

Tape

Counter

Summary

000	Introduction.
010	Bob Fogg's wife recently passed away. Bob Fogg managed the McCall airport during Larkin's early years.
025	The year 2000 has seen a lot of forest fires, particularly in Idaho and Montana. 1949 was another bad fire year and Larkin's first as a pilot fighting fire. Larkin discussed the initial attack on fires in 1949, and he offered his opinions on why the fires in 2000 are so bad.
050	Larkin discussed the number and size of fires in Idaho forests in 1949. He described the physical conditions that can lead to large fires. The best way to fight fire is a hard, initial attack, according to Larkin. Larkin opined that these fires in 2000 would burn until the snow extinguished them in the winter.
090	1949 was Larkin's first fighting fire. He described how that shaped his other years fighting fire and what physical conditions led to the 1949 busy fire season.
110	Larkin recalled 1964 as another bad fire year, but it did not reach the proportions of 2000. Larkin continued to describe the acreage involved in a big fire in the 1960s; Larkin said around 2,000 acres was a big fire. Larkin described the different jobs (and airplanes) for a pilot to do (or fly) during the 1960s. Pilot worked long hours during the 1960s, which led to duty hour limitations for pilots.
170	Fire retardant drops have been used for thirty years or more, according to Larkin. He offered his thoughts on retardant drops during the present day and on the history of retardant drops. He told a story about how California fire bosses refused to use retardant drops on large fires. This refusal led to the creation of MAFFS (Military Airborne Fire Fighting System). Larkin offered his opinion about MAFFS.
250	Prompted by a question about the Forest Service, Larkin talked about how the Service always has walked a fine line with factions of the public upset with them for whatever they do. Larkin told a story about a disagreement between the Forest Service and homesteaders in the Bear Valley area.

330 In a book, entitled *Two-Man Stick*, the author—Bud Filler—told a story about Larkin and one smokejumper drop. Larkin discussed what he remembered about the story. Larkin described the relationship between pilots and smokejumpers. Larkin attended smokejumper reunions, and at the last meeting, he flew a Ford Tri-Motor to Portland, Oregon, from Redding, California.

410 Larkin flew a lot of smokejumpers with the Ford Tri-Motor airplane. Larkin talked about the importance of this plane to fire fighting in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

450 Larkin retired from the Forest Service as a full-time pilot in 1978. He explained why he left full-time work at that time.

495 **END OF SIDE ONE**
TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

000 During the 1970s the Forest Service changed, at least in terms of managing forest fires. Larkin retired during that time, and he spoke of the changes he saw before he left the Service, particularly increases in bureaucracy and specialization.

040 After he retired from the Forest Service, Larkin flew part time for the Bureau of Reclamation, for Bill Harrah to the Middle Fork Lodge, and for Albertson's Inc. He also flew part time for the Forest Service in the summer. Most of flying after retirement was hauling personnel to and from locations.

090 Larkin has been a part of Mountain Flying Seminars, which is a group of women that have trained pilots to fly in the backcountry since the middle of the 1990s. It started with Lynn Clark, who was one of Idaho's first female backcountry pilots, and it has continued with two other women. Larkin taught pilots about all possible problems that could arise in the backcountry. He is their "Gotcha" Specialist.

135 Larkin explained the importance of training pilots to fly in the backcountry. He told a story about a pilot and his family who died trying to land on a backcountry airstrip. He described how flying in high altitude, especially during the summer heat, affects the airplane.

210 The Canadian Discovery Channel produced a show, entitled *Flightpath III: Wild Wings*. They filmed Larkin flying a Ford Tri-Motor for a small segment of the show. Larkin described how he became involved in this one particular episode, which discussed backcountry flying and wolf reintroduction into Idaho.

260 Larkin detailed the changes in backcountry flying over the sixty-plus years in Idaho forests. He particularly described the changes involved with more pilots and airplanes flying the Idaho mountains and forests. Larkin said that many non-Idaho pilots come to the area and try to land in these backcountry strips. He has fears that the amount of aircraft in the air around McCall, Idaho, will cause many accidents in the future.

375 Larkin talked about how the Forest Service stopped commercial and private flying through the forest in the summer of 2000. Larkin thought he never had seen a fire season similar to the fires in 2000. Previously, Larkin felt that 1949, 1956 & 1957, and the early 1960s, were very bad fire years, but they do not compare to summer 2000.

425 Larkin has attended smokejumper reunions and the Forest Service Retirees' Club. He offered his thoughts on why he has kept in touch with people who he fought fire with in the past. He felt that his Forest Service co-workers are similar to a second family.

465 **END OF SIDE TWO**
END OF INTERVIEW

NAMES AND PLACES INDEX

Albertson's Inc.
Atlanta fire (2000)
Big Creek (Idaho)
Bureau of Reclamation
Burgdorf fire (2000)
Chamberlain Basin (Idaho)
Clark, Lynn
Clear Creek [near Salmon, ID] fire (2000)
Cox, Lafe
Dorris, Bill
Dorris, Pat
Ellison, Warren
Filler, Bud
Flightpath III: Wild Wings (TV program produced by the Canadian Discovery Channel)
Garden Valley, Idaho
Harrah, Bill
Hells Canyon
Hoover, Amy
Idaho City, Idaho
Indian Creek (Idaho)
Larkin, Joe
McCall Air Taxi Service
McCall, Idaho
McCall Mountain/Canyon Flying Seminars
McNichols, Lori
Middle Fork Lodge (Idaho)
Military Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS)
Mountain Flying Seminars
National Interagency Fire Center
Pistol Creek (Idaho)
Stanley, Idaho
Stover, James "Smoky"
Two-Man Stick (book written by Bud Filler)
United States Forest Service
Yellowjacket, Idaho